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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [IS](#) [KMDR](#) [MEDIA](#) [REACTION](#) [REPORT](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION  
Sunday-Monday, 11-12 December 2005

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SUBJECT COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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- [1.](#) US Pressures Israel on Safe Passage Agreement
- [2.](#) Sharon's Kadima Political Moves
- [3.](#) Israel and the Iranian Nuclear Program
- [4.](#) Defense Establishment Expected View of Egypt

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Key stories in the media:  
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The Army Radio reported Sunday morning that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz quit the Likud and joined Sharon's Kadima Party. The move was met with a host of criticism. Haaretz reported Monday that senior Kadima members said the move was unnecessary and damaging for the new party, harming its image. Likud's Netanyahu said Kadima is conducting a political horse-trade and introducing negative norms to Israeli politics. Senior Likud MK Steinitz said Mofaz is an opportunist, just like Peres. Labor spokesmen, according to Haaretz, said this shows Kadima is a Likud replica, which should help Labor, and Labor Chairman Peretz said Mofaz's move is in line with the fact that Israeli politicians have long lost their values.

Following a Sunday Times report that Prime Minister Ari'el Sharon has ordered the IDF to prepare for an attack on Iranian nuclear facilities in March 2006, the Jerusalem Post reported on Sunday, 11 December that Israeli officials declined to respond to the report directly, but Sharon's spokesman Ra'anan Gissin did say, "Israel has no intention of launching an attack against Iran, definitely not before all diplomatic options have been exhausted." He stressed that those suggesting Israel will bomb Iran weren't helpful, in part because they "exonerate the Europeans" from taking action, "which is something we don't want to happen." He described the Europeans as "the ones who hold most of the cards to influence Iran." Maj. Gen. (Res.) Amos Gilad, head of the Defense Ministry's Foreign Policy Department, told Israel Radio Sunday that while a military operation against Iran's nuclear facilities could not be ruled out, the Sunday Times article that Israel planned to attack Iran in March 2006 is false. Deputy Prime Minister Olmert is cited in Maariv on Monday as saying that though Israel is concerned, the issue should be addressed by the UN and the international community. NSC head Eiland told Maariv the report is a baseless speculation, and Foreign Minister Shalom added this problem should be resolved in the political ring.

The Jerusalem Post reported Sunday that as US envoy David Welch wrapped up his visit to the region Saturday, Israel maintained its stance that Palestinian convoys between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are unacceptable due to security concerns. "This prime minister is not going to repeat the mistakes of the past," when Israeli leaders turned "a blind eye" to PA transgressions, said Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's spokesman Ra'anan Gissin. He said there was no change in Israel's policy on the convoys.

Haaretz reported Monday that Israel has pledged not to impose a siege on the Gaza Strip that would prevent the import and export of goods regardless of the political

situation. This appears in writing in a World Bank non-paper drafted ahead of the donor countries' conference in London Wednesday. Israel also pledged not to close the Karni and Erez crossings at the same time, except for security reasons involving both crossings. The report added that the defense minister reported yesterday that the decision to freeze contact with the PA on the safe-crossing convoys between Gaza and the West Bank is still in force.

In a related report, Haaretz said Sunday the US and the Quartet members last weekend increased pressure on Israel to complete the commitments it had undertaken in the crossings agreement that was signed last month. A political source estimated Sunday that if the next few days are quiet, the crossing would open Thursday, with an initial trial bus going from Gaza to the West Bank. Senior Jerusalem political sources expressed concern that if the defense establishment violates this agreement, the donor countries' conference will criticize Israel. The paper cites a recent report by the World Bank, drafted ahead of the donor countries' conference, that blames Israel for much of the economic distress in the territories.

On Monday, Haaretz reported that the Israeli Foreign Ministry is accusing the EU of violating the international law by conducting contacts with Hizballah and intending to establish links with Hamas.

Haaretz reported Monday that an armed Palestinian was killed and two were wounded during an IDF operation in Nablus. In a related story, Yediot Aharonot said Monday that Hamas and the Islamic Jihad announced yesterday they will not extend the cease-fire past January 2006, having pledged to maintain it through the end of 2005. Organization leaders are cited as saying the move produced no positive results. PA Chairman Abu-Mazen called on them to renew the cease-fire, while the Israeli defense establishment estimates that the Palestinian organizations will refrain from violence only until the PA elections end and then resume their terror attacks.

The Jerusalem Post reported Sunday that PA Chairman Mahmud Abbas on Saturday criticized Palestinian groups for launching rocket attacks on Israel, saying such actions harmed Palestinian interests. However, Abbas stopped short of promising to take any action against those responsible for the rocket attacks. Abbas reiterated his commitment to holding parliamentary elections on time. Abbas's remarks came as Hamas reaffirmed its adherence to the hudna, but on condition that Israel halt its attacks. Egyptian intelligence chief Gen. Omar Suleiman, who helped broker the first truce earlier this year, was supposed to arrive in the Palestinian territories last week, but has postponed his visit because of the latest cycle of violence. The Jerusalem Post reported Sunday that Palestinian activists have filed civil lawsuits in the US against former Shin Bet head Avi Dichter and former IDF chief Moshe Ya'alon for alleged war crimes related to the targeted killing of top Hamas terrorist Salah Shehade three years ago. Both men are in the US at present. A Yediot Aharonot report Monday said Israeli and Syrian ambassadors in the UN offices in Geneva held direct contact, with Pakistani mediation, in the wake of which Israel withdrew its objection to having Syria become a member of the "informal group of countries" that is part of the World Trade Organization. The Jerusalem Post reported Sunday that Egypt put its installations along the Suez Canal on high alert over the weekend after receiving warnings of a possible terrorist attack by al-Qaida on ships in the strategic waterway. The alert coincidentally followed a report in The Jerusalem Post Friday that the Israeli Navy had decided to avoid the Suez Canal out of concern its vessels would be targets for Islamic Jihad terrorists. Haaretz reported Sunday that hundreds of Golan Druze and Israeli Arabs staged a demonstration Saturday in support of Syria, due to the international pressure it is under. This was the first stage operation by the Golan-based National Committee for Identification with Syria.

#### 1. US Pressures Israel on Safe Passage Agreement

##### Summary

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The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Israel entered into the Rafah agreement with trepidation. But Washington's arm-twisting convinced Jerusalem that cameras and computer data streams would give Israeli security personnel capability to monitor what was happening at the Gaza-Sinai crossing. While the issue is disputed, Israel is convinced that the PA is foot-dragging by not providing

the promised real-time flow, and that members of al-Qaida and other Islamic terror groups have been allowed to enter Gaza.. Having pressured Israel into a bad agreement in the first place, Washington now insists Jerusalem stick to it. It says Jerusalem is exaggerating Palestinian non-compliance; that the video and data issues are merely technical and anyway on the way to being solved."

#### Bloc Quotes

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"Unsafe Passage"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Israel entered into the Rafah agreement with trepidation. But Washington's arm-twisting convinced Jerusalem that cameras and computer data streams would give Israeli security personnel capability to monitor what was happening at the Gaza-Sinai crossing. While the issue is disputed, Israel is convinced that the PA is foot-dragging by not providing the promised real-time flow, and that members of al-Qaida and other Islamic terror groups have been allowed to enter Gaza. The agreement also requires the PA to prevent the movement of weapons and explosives into Gaza. Yet large amounts of these have flowed in from Sinai, at least before the crossing was formally opened. On Saturday, the IDF uncovered a tunnel near the northern Strip apparently intended for a terrorist infiltration. On Friday a navy patrol boat intercepted the third infiltration attempt by sea, in just 10 days, from Egypt to Gaza. Part of the problem is the agreement itself - which does not actually require the PA to stop any terrorist just because Israel insists it do so. Then there is the overall environment. Can Israel abide by a paradoxical situation in which bus convoys of Palestinians traverse the country even as Palestinian missiles are being launched from Gaza, or as Palestinian attackers stab soldiers at checkpoints outside Jerusalem, or as suicide bombers slaughter shoppers lining up to enter a Netanya mall? Sharon told US envoy David Welch that if the Palestinians persisted in their violent ways, Israel would not permit the bus convoys and would even cease tariff cooperation at the Karni and Erez crossings, forcing the PA to pay for goods shipped via Israel. The US is having none of this. Having pressured Israel into a bad agreement in the first place, Washington now insists Jerusalem stick to it. It says Jerusalem is exaggerating Palestinian non-compliance; that the video and data issues are merely technical and anyway on the way to being solved."

## 12. Sharon's Kadima Political Moves

#### Summary

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Independent, left-leaning Haaretz carries a commentary by political analyst Yosi Verter saying: "Sharon wants to smash the Likud, rip it apart, and leave nothing behind. His resentment for the party he established and had a hard time leaving knows no boundaries. Mofaz' defection crumbled yet another stone. From now on, it is the rebels' party (except for Foreign Minister Shalom and MK Michael Eytan), which is exactly how Sharon wanted it. He wished to shove the Likud to the most extreme corner, to send it back to the times when Herut under Menachem Begin was a marginal and ridiculed party."

#### Bloc Quotes

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"The Bulldozer's Revenge"

Independent, left-leaning Haaretz carries a commentary by political analyst Yosi Verter saying: "Having been immersed in a murky quagmire of denials, excuses, lies, defections, and skips and hops, the Israeli political system went out of its way yesterday to condemn Mofaz [for quitting Likud and joining Kadima], but he took it like a man. His political conduct over the past few weeks was unprofessional. Following someone's advise, he lashed at Sharon in front of every microphone and TV camera, thus distancing himself from Sharon's supporters among the Likud voters. Once he started blabbering himself to death on the media, he turned overnight from a practical and professional defense minister, a natural Sharon ally, into just another politician. Mofaz, however, is not the only problem. Sharon and his big appetite is another major problem. On Saturday night, three hours before Mofaz called Sharon's ranch, one of the prime minister's aides said there will be no more additions to the party. 'That's

it,' he said, 'we should make do with what we have and move on.' The aide thought so, but his boss had different ideas. Sharon wants to smash the Likud, rip it apart, and leave nothing behind. His resentment for the party he established and had a hard time leaving knows no boundaries. Mofaz' defection crumbled yet another stone. From now on, it is the rebels' party (except for Foreign Minister Shalom and MK Michael Eytan), which is exactly how Sharon wanted it. He wished to shove the Likud to the most extreme corner, to send it back to the times when Herut under Menachem Begin was a marginal and ridiculed party. Sharon is headed for that goal like a bulldozer, ignoring the environmental damage.. Was Mofaz' joining Kadima too excessive? Probably not. Kadima was not established on his move and it would not make it fail. But Sharon must learn some table manners. This is no way to behave. It is not so terrible to leave something on the plate."

### 13. Israel and the Iranian Nuclear Program

#### Summary

Ofer Shelach, liberal op-ed writes in Mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot:

"The army has never hidden the fact that it has a response prepared to meet the Iranian threat. The IAF has been training at long-range flights for years, and a great deal of money has been invested in building the long arm of the Air Force. To that end, the IAF purchased special planes, espionage systems and electronic warfare, while methods were developed and acquired to allow for heavily protected sites to be attacked. This process has been underway for more than a decade... The Americans take a more realistic point of view, which posits that it will take the Iranians longer to complete the process. With that having been said, the United States and Israel fully agree on the severity of the Iranian threat, an agreement that expressed itself in the annual strategic dialogue that was recently held in Washington....The US administration is troubled by the statements made by Israeli officials about a possible attack."

#### Block quotes

##### "A Clear American Message"

Ofer Shelach, liberal op-ed writes in Mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot:

"We can safely venture that there is a group of unit commanders in the IDF at large and in the IAF in particular, flight squadron commanders and combat troops who, if you were to wake them up in the middle of the night and were to whisper the right code word in their ear, would be on their way to Iran in no time. The army has never hidden the fact that it has a response prepared to meet the Iranian threat. The IAF has been training at long-range flights for years, and a great deal of money has been invested in building the long arm of the Air Force. To that end, the IAF purchased special planes, espionage systems and electronic warfare, while methods were developed and acquired to allow for heavily protected sites to be attacked. This process has been underway for more than a decade. The natural assumption is that the best model for comparison's sake is the attack on the Iraqi reactor. That is the model of action that appeared yesterday in the Sunday Times. However, the IDF planner would have to be a real amateur to believe that the attack in Iraq could be reenacted-and the IDF planner is no amateur. In 1981, all it took was eight F-16s that made a surprise attack and destroyed a single target. Israel issued no ultimatum, issued no warning; and when it acted, it acted alone. Even its American allies didn't know about the attack.... One of the reasons that Israel has kept a low profile with regard to military activity is so as not to dismantle that coalition. That way an operation against Iran will not be perceived as a "Zionist plot," but as a solution to a world-wide problem. Nor will there be a strategic surprise: any attack will be preceded by condemnation, sanctions and ultimatums by the member countries of the anti-Iranian coalition. Moreover, the attack in Iran will not be aimed against a lone target, since Iran's nuclear facilities are spread out all over the country. The uranium is not being enriched in the nuclear reactors but by means of well-hidden centrifuges. It would be easy to rebuild those sites quickly, so that attacking them might miss the mark and only encourage the Iranians to seek revenge and to continue to pursue their nuclear program with redoubled effort.... For the time being, the Iranians have not reactivated their

centrifuges. Irrespective of whether the reason for that is technical problems or international pressure, it is only a matter of time before that equipment is put back into use. From that moment on, the countdown to the "point of no return" will begin--the point from which Iran will be capable of manufacturing nuclear weapons. Israeli officials say that the point of no return is just a few months away from the moment the centrifuges are reactivated. The United States says it will take approximately two years. The disparity in assessments stems from the fact that the Israelis opt for the most extreme case scenario, in which the Iranians quickly overcome all of the limitations and technical difficulties they have encountered to date. The Americans take a more realistic point of view, which posits that it will take the Iranians longer to complete the process. With that having been said, the United States and Israel fully agree on the severity of the Iranian threat, an agreement that expressed itself in the annual strategic dialogue that was recently held in Washington. That agreement notwithstanding, the US administration is troubled by the statements made by Israeli officials about a possible attack. For instance, administration officials have heard formal Israeli officials say that the diplomatic effort has failed, and intuit that the second, unstated part of that sentence comes in the form of a military operation. In the current state of affairs, what with the Iraqi house of cards on the verge of collapse, the last thing the administration needs is an independent Israeli operation in Iran. As such, it is safe to assume that the messages the Americans have conveyed to Israel about a possible Israeli military strike have left no room for any misunderstanding."

#### 14. Defense Establishment Expected View of Egypt

##### Summary

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Liberal op-ed columnist Ofer Shelah writes in pluralist, mass-circulation Yediot Aharonot: "Although the peace agreement with Egypt has been stable for a quarter of a century, we are about to hear a lot of warnings about Egypt. Why is that? Because our traditional enemies, certainly those who had an army that could have been presented as posing a threat to Israel, are gradually vanishing. There is a fear here that on the day we realize that we have built a massive military force, at an enormous cost, one that has excess force that faces zero-probability threats but cannot guarantee a victory in the real campaigns -- because if the goals of wars are not defined, you can never win them -- we will start asking too many questions. It is much simpler, natural, and almost obvious to warn us against the old devils. So, get ready: you are going to hear a lot about Egypt next year."

##### Bloc Quotes

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"Get Ready for the Next Enemy"

Liberal op-ed columnist Ofer Shelah writes in pluralist, mass-circulation Yediot Aharonot: "In the coming year, you will hear a lot about Egypt. Despite the surprising friendship between Prime Minister Ari'el Sharon and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (and some speakers say because of it), despite the fact that Egypt played a crucial role in the unwritten agreements between Israel and Egypt that allowed for the current lull, and although the peace agreement with Egypt has been stable for a quarter of a century, we are about to hear a lot of warnings about Egypt. Why is that? Because our traditional enemies, certainly those who had an army that could have been presented as posing a threat to Israel, are gradually vanishing. Very few Israelis believe the propaganda maneuvers concerning Syria.. Although the defense establishment is bragging a lot, we are gradually acknowledging the fact that an Iranian threat exists, but its solution would not be military.. And the Saudi threat is really not making an impression. So only Egypt is left.. This is not a conspiracy devised by the budget-thirsty defense establishment. It follows from a worldview that is fundamentally based on suspicion.. There is a fear here that on the day we realize that we have built a massive military force, at an enormous cost, one that has excess force and faces zero-probability threats, but cannot guarantee a victory in the real campaigns -- because if the goals of wars are not defined, you can never win them -- we will start asking too many questions. It is much simpler, natural, and almost obvious to warn us against the old devils. So, get ready: you are going to hear a lot about Egypt next

year."  
JONES